

# The Case of the Man Who was Wanted

Arthur Whitaker

1892 (Smith) to 1910 (Tracy/Lellenberg)

*The Case of the Man who was Wanted* was written by Arthur Whitaker sometime between 1892 (per Edgar W. Smith) and 1910 (per Jack Tracy and John Lellenberg). Apparently, the story was sent to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle for some kind of review, and it has been suggested (see Jack Tracy, *The Published Apocrypha* and John Lellenberg, *Nova 57 Minor*) that Whitaker was angling for a collaboration. According to Tracy/Lellenberg, Sir Arthur declined, but did send a letter to Mr. Whitaker suggesting that he would be willing to purchase the plot of the story for 10 pounds (Lellenberg indicates 10 Guineas). Tracy/Lellenberg noted that the sale went down, but the plot was never written into a Holmes story by Doyle and the typewritten original was filed away in Sir Arthur's papers, where it resided until found by Hesketh Pearson while he was researching for his Doyle biography. Mention was made of the story in Pearson's 1943 book and a couple of paragraphs were printed, but the estate refused offers for publication until 1948, when it was published, complete, in the August edition of *Cosmopolitan Magazine* as a LONG LOST Sherlock Holmes story. It was republished in the London *Sunday Dispatch* in January of 1949. In both publications, the story was attributed to Sir Arthur until Arthur Whitaker, who was still living, came forward producing a carbon copy of the typewritten story and, eventually, the letter from Sir Arthur with the offer to buy the plot. A long battle ensued between the Doyle Estate (Adrian) and Whitaker (who simply wanted to save the family embarrassment). After much vitriol, the estate agreed that the story was not written by Sir Arthur and was, indeed, a pastiche. Whitaker captured much of Sir Arthur's style in some parts of the story, but it is not considered a great pastiche. It is, however, considered part of the Apocrypha.

# The Man Who Was Wanted

Arthur Whitaker

written between  
1892 (EW Smith) and 1901

"Good old Index. You can't beat it."

Information about  
The Man who was Wanted

During the late autumn of 'ninety-five a fortunate chance enabled me to take some part in another of my friend Sherlock Holmes's fascinating cases. My wife not having been well for some time, I had at last persuaded her to take a holiday in Switzerland in the company of her old school friend Kate Whitney, whose name may be remembered in connection with the strange case I have already chronicled under the title of "The Man with the Twisted Lip." My practice had grown much, and I had been working very hard for many months and never felt in more need myself of a rest and a holiday. Unfortunately I dared not absent myself for a long enough period to warrant a visit to the Alps. I promised my wife, however, that I would get a week or ten days' holiday in somehow, and it was only on this understanding that she consented to the Swiss tour I was so anxious for her to take. One of my best patients was in a very critical state at the time, and it was not until August was gone that he passed the crisis and began to recover. Feeling then that I could leave my practice with a good conscience in the hands of a locum tenens, I began to wonder where and how I should best find the rest and change I needed.

Almost at once the idea came to my mind that I would hunt up my old friend Sherlock Holmes, of whom I had seen nothing for several months. If he had no important inquiry in hand, I would do my uttermost to persuade him to join me.

Within half an hour of coming to this resolution I was standing in the doorway of the familiar old room in Baker Street.

Holmes was stretched upon the couch with his back towards me, the familiar dressing gown and old brier pipe as much in evidence as of yore.

"Come in, Watson," he cried, without glancing round. "Come in and tell me what good wind blows you here?"

"What an ear you have, Holmes," I said. "I don't think that I could have recognized your tread so easily."

"Nor I yours," said he, "if you hadn't come up my badly lighted staircase taking the steps two at a time with all the familiarity of an old fellow lodger; even then I might not have been sure who it was, but when you stumbled over the new mat outside the door which has been there for nearly three months, you needed no further announcement."

Holmes pulled out two or three of the cushions from the pile he was lying on and threw them across into the armchair. "Sit down, Watson, and make yourself comfortable; you'll find cigarettes in a box behind the clock."

As I proceeded to comply, Holmes glanced whimsically across at me. "I'm afraid I shall have to disappoint you, my boy," he said. "I had a wire only half an hour ago which will prevent me from joining in any little trip you may have been about to propose."

"Really, Holmes," I said, "don't you think this is going a little too far? I begin to fear you are a fraud and pretend to discover things by observation, when all the time you really do it by pure out-and-out clairvoyance!"

Holmes chuckled. "Knowing you as I do it's absurdly simple," said he. "Your surgery hours are from five to seven, yet at six o'clock you walk smiling into my rooms. Therefore you must have a locum in. You are looking well, though tired, so the obvious reason is that you are having, or about to have, a holiday. The clinical thermometer, peeping out of your pocket, proclaims that you have been on your rounds today, hence it's pretty evident that your real holiday begins tomorrow. When, under these circumstances, you come hurrying into my rooms—which, by the way, Watson, you haven't visited for nearly three months—with a new Bradshaw and a timetable of excursion bookings bulging out of your coat pocket, then it's more than probable you have come with the idea of suggesting some joint expedition."

"It's all perfectly true," I said, and explained to him, in a few words,

my plans. "And I'm more disappointed than I can tell you," I concluded, "that you are not able to fall in with my little scheme."

Holmes picked up a telegram from the table and looked at it thoughtfully. "If only the inquiry this refers to promised to be of anything like the interest of some we have gone into together, nothing would have delighted me more than to have persuaded you to throw your lot in with mine for a time; but really I'm afraid to do so, for it sounds a particularly commonplace affair," and he crumpled the paper into a ball and tossed it over to me.

I smoothed it out and read: "To Holmes, 221B Baker Street, London, S.W. Please come to Sheffield at once to inquire into case of forgery. Jervis, Manager British Consolidated Bank."

"I've wired back to say I shall go up to Sheffield by the one-thirty-a.m. express from St. Pancras," said Holmes. "I can't go sooner as I have an interesting little appointment to fulfill tonight down in the East End, which should give me the last information I need to trace home a daring robbery from the British Museum to its instigator—who possesses one of the oldest titles and finest houses in the country, along with a most insatiable greed, almost mania, for collecting ancient documents. Before discussing the Sheffield affair any further, however, we had perhaps better see what the evening paper has to say about it," continued Holmes, as his boy entered with the Evening News, Standard, Globe, and Star. "Ah, this must be it," he said, pointing to a paragraph headed: "Daring Forger's Remarkable Exploits in Sheffield."

Whilst going to press we have been informed that a series of most cleverly forged cheques have been successfully used to swindle the Sheffield banks out of a sum which cannot be less than six thousand pounds. The full extent of the fraud has not yet been ascertained, and the managers of the different banks concerned, who have been interviewed by our Sheffield correspondent, are very reticent.

It appears that a gentleman named Mr. Jabez Booth, who resides at Broomhill, Sheffield, and has been an employee since January 1881, at the British Consolidated Bank in Sheffield, yesterday succeeded in cashing quite a number of cleverly forged cheques at twelve of the principal banks in the city and absconding with the proceeds.

The crime appears to have been a strikingly deliberate and well-thought-out one. Mr. Booth had, of course, in his position in one of the principal banks in Sheffield, excellent opportunities of studying the

various signatures which he forged, and he greatly facilitated his chances of easily and successfully obtaining cash for the cheques by opening banking accounts last year at each of the twelve banks at which he presented the forged cheques, and by this means becoming personally known at each.

He still further disarmed suspicion by crossing each of the forged cheques and paying them into his account, while, at the same time, he drew and cashed a cheque of his own for about half the amount of the forged cheque paid in.

It was not until early this morning, Thursday, that the fraud was discovered, which means that the rascal has had some twenty hours in which to make good his escape. In spite of this we have little doubt but that he will soon be laid by the heels, for we are informed that the finest detectives from Scotland Yard are already upon his track, and it is also whispered that Mr. Sherlock Holmes, the well-known and almost world-famed criminal expert of Baker Street, has been asked to assist in hunting down this daring forger.

"Then there follows a lengthy description of the fellow, which I needn't read but will keep for future use," said Holmes, folding the paper and looking across at me. "It seems to have been a pretty smart affair. This Booth may not be easily caught for, though he hasn't had a long time in which to make his escape, we mustn't lose sight of the fact that he's had twelve months in which to plan how he would do the vanishing trick when the time came. Well! What do you say, Watson? Some of the little problems we have gone into in the past should at least have taught us that the most interesting cases do not always present the most bizarre features at the outset."

"So far from it, on the contrary, quite the reverse," to quote Sam Weller, "I replied. "Personally nothing would be more to my taste than to join you."

"Then we'll consider it settled," said my friend. "And now I must go and attend to that other little matter of business I spoke to you about. Remember," he said, as we parted, "one-thirty at St. Pancras."

I was on the platform in good time, but it was not until the hands of the great station clock indicated the very moment due for our departure, and the porters were beginning to slam the carriage doors

noisily, that I caught the familiar sight of Holmes's tall figure.

"Ah! here you are, Watson," he cried cheerily. "I fear you must have thought I was going to be too late. I've had a very busy evening and no time to waste; however, I've succeeded in putting into practice Phileas Fogg's theory that 'a well-used minimum suffices for everything,' and here I am.

"About the last thing I should expect of you," I said as we settled down into two opposite corners of an otherwise empty first-class carriage, "would be that you should do such an unmethodical thing as to miss a train. The only thing which would surprise me more, in fact, would be to see you at the station ten minutes before time."

"I should consider that the greatest evil of the two," said Holmes sententiously. "But now we must sleep; we have every prospect of a heavy day."

It was one of Holmes's characteristics that he could command sleep at will; unfortunately he could resist it at will also, and often have I had to remonstrate with him on the harm he must be doing himself, when, deeply engrossed in one of his strange or baffling problems, he would go for several consecutive days and nights without one wink of sleep.

He put the shades over the lamps, leaned back in his corner, and in less than two minutes his regular breathing told me he was fast asleep. Not being blessed with the same gift myself, I lay back in my corner for some time, nodding to the rhythmical throb of the express as it hurled itself forward through the darkness. Now and again as we shot through some brilliantly illuminated station or past a line of flaming furnaces, I caught for an instant a glimpse of Holmes's figure coiled up snugly in the far corner with his head sunk upon his breast.

It was not until after we had passed Nottingham that I really fell asleep and, when a more than usually violent lurch of the train over some points woke me again, it was broad daylight, and Holmes was sitting up, busy with a Bradshaw and boat timetable. As I moved, he glanced across at me.

"If I'm not mistaken, Watson, that was the Dore and Totley tunnel through which we have just come, and if so we shall be in Sheffield in a few minutes. As you see, I've not been wasting my time altogether, but studying my Bradshaw, which, by the way, Watson, is the most useful book published, without exception, to anyone of my calling."

"How can it possibly help you now?" I asked in some surprise.

"Well, it may or it may not," said Holmes thoughtfully. "But in any case it's well to have at one's finger tips all knowledge which may be of use. It's quite probable that this Jabez Booth may have decided to leave the country and, if this supposition is correct, he would undoubtedly time his little escapade in conformity with information contained in this useful volume. Now, I learn from this Sheffield Telegraph, which I obtained at Leicester, by the way, when you were fast asleep, that Mr. Booth cashed the last of his forged cheques at the North British Bank in Saville Street at precisely two-fifteen p.m. on Wednesday last. He made the round of the various banks he visited in a hansom, and it would take him about three minutes only to get from this bank to the G. C. station. From what I gather of the order in which the different banks were visited, he made a circuit, finishing at the nearest point to the G.C. station, at which he could arrive at about two-eighteen. Now, I find that at two-twenty-two a boat express would leave Sheffield G.C., due in Liverpool at four-twenty, and in connection with it the White Star liner Empress Queen should have sailed from Liverpool docks at six-thirty for New York. Or again at two-forty-five a boat train would leave Sheffield for Hull, at which town it was due at four-thirty, in time to make a connection with the Holland steam packet, Comet, sailing at six-thirty for Amsterdam.

"Here we are provided with two not unlikely means of escape, the former being the most probable; but both worth bearing in mind."

Holmes had scarcely finished speaking when the train drew up.

"Nearly five past four," I remarked.

"Yes," said Holmes, "we are exactly one and a half minutes behind time. And now I propose a good breakfast and a cup of strong coffee, for we have at least a couple of hours to spare."

After breakfast we visited first the police station where we learned that no further developments had taken place in the matter we had come to investigate. Mr. Lestrade of Scotland Yard had arrived the previous evening and had taken the case in hand officially.

We obtained the address of Mr. Jervis, the manager of the bank at which Booth had been an employee, and also that of his landlady at Broomhill.

A hansom landed us at Mr. Jervis's house at Fulwood at seven-thirty.



Holmes insisted upon my accompanying him, and we were both shown into a spacious drawing room and asked to wait until the banker could see us.

Mr. Jervis, a stout, florid gentleman of about fifty, came puffing into the room in a very short time. An atmosphere of prosperity seemed to envelop, if not actually to emanate from him.

"Pardon me for keeping you waiting, gentlemen," he said, "but the hour is an early one."

"Indeed, Mr. Jervis," said Holmes, "no apology is needed unless it be on our part. It is, however, necessary that I should ask you a few questions concerning this affair of Mr. Booth, before I can proceed in the matter, and that must be our excuse for paying you such an untimely visit."

"I shall be most happy to answer your questions as far as it lies in my power to do so," said the banker, his fat fingers playing with a bunch of seals at the end of his massive gold watch chain.

"When did Mr. Booth first enter your bank?" said Holmes.

"In January 1881."

"Do you know where he lived when he first came to Sheffield?"

"He took lodgings at Ashgate Road, and has, I believe, lived there ever since."

"Do you know anything of his history or life before he came to you?"

"Very little, I fear; beyond that his parents were both dead, and that he came to us with the best testimonials from one of the Leeds branches of our bank, I know nothing."

"Did you find him quick and reliable?"

"He was one of the best and smartest men I have ever had in my employ."

"Do you know whether he was conversant with any other language besides English?"

"I feel pretty sure he wasn't. We have one clerk who attends to any foreign correspondence we may have, and I know that Booth has



repeatedly passed letters and papers on to him."

"With your experience of banking matters, Mr. Jervis, how long a time do you think he might reasonably have calculated would elapse between the presentation of the forged cheques and their detection?"

"Well, that would depend very largely upon circumstances," said Mr. Jervis. "In the case of a single cheque it might be a week or two, unless the amounts were so large as to call for special inquiry, in which case it would probably never be cashed at all until such inquiry had been made. In the present case, when there were a dozen forged cheques, it was most unlikely that some one of them should not be detected within twenty-four hours and so lead to the discovery of the fraud. No sane person would dare to presume upon the crime remaining undetected for a longer period than that."

"Thanks," said Holmes, rising. "Those were the chief points I wished to speak to you about. I will communicate to you any news of importance I may have."

"I am deeply obliged to you, Mr. Holmes. The case is naturally causing us great anxiety. We leave it entirely to your discretion to take whatever steps you may consider best. Oh, by the way, I sent instructions to Booth's landlady to disturb nothing in his rooms until you had had an opportunity of examining them."

"That was a very wise thing to do," said Holmes, "and may be the means of helping us materially."

"I am also instructed by my company," said the banker, as he bowed us politely out, "to ask you to make a note of any expenses incurred, which they will of course immediately defray."

A few moments later we were ringing the bell of the house in Ashgate Road, Broomhill, at which Mr. Booth had been a lodger for over seven years. It was answered by a maid who informed us that Mrs. Purnell was engaged with a gentleman upstairs. When we explained our errand she showed us at once up to Mr. Booth's rooms, on the first floor, where we found Mrs. Purnell, a plump, voluble, little lady of about forty, in conversation with Mr. Lestrade, who appeared to be just concluding his examination of the rooms.

"Good morning, Holmes," said the detective, with a very self-satisfied air. "You arrive on the scene a little too late; I fancy I have already got

all the information needed to catch our man!"

"I'm delighted to hear it," said Holmes dryly, "and must indeed congratulate you, if this is actually the case. Perhaps after I've made a little tour of inspection we can compare notes."

"Just as you please," said Lestrade, with the air of one who can afford to be gracious. "Candidly, I think you will be wasting time, and so would you if you knew what I've discovered."

"Still, I must ask you to humour my little whim," said Holmes, leaning against the mantelpiece and whistling softly as he looked round the room.

After a moment he turned to Mrs. Purnell. "The furniture of this room belongs, of course, to you?"

Mrs. Purnell assented.

"The picture that was taken down from over the mantelpiece last Wednesday morning," continued Holmes, "that belonged to Mr. Booth, I presume?"

I followed Holmes's glance across to where an unfaded patch on the wallpaper clearly indicated that a picture had recently been hanging. Well as I knew my friend's methods of reasoning, however, I did not realize for a moment that the little bits of spiderweb which had been behind the picture, and were still clinging to the wall, had told him that the picture could only have been taken down immediately before Mrs. Purnell had received orders to disturb nothing in the room; otherwise her brush, evidently busy enough elsewhere, would not have spared them.

The good lady stared at Sherlock Holmes in openmouthed astonishment. "Mr. Booth took it down himself on Wednesday morning," she said. "It was a picture he had painted himself, and he thought no end of it. He wrapped it up and took it out with him, remarking that he was going to give it to a friend. I was very much surprised at the time, for I knew he valued it very much; in fact he once told me that he wouldn't part with it for anything. Of course, it's easy to see now why he got rid of it."

"Yes," said Holmes. "It wasn't a large picture, I see. Was it a water colour?"

**"Yes, a painting of a stretch of moorland, with three or four large rocks arranged like a big table on a bare hilltop. Druidicals, Mr. Booth called them, or something like that."**

**"Did Mr. Booth do much painting, then?" enquired Holmes.**

**"None, whilst he's been here, sir. He has told me he used to do a good deal as a lad, but he had given it up."**

**Holmes's eyes were glancing round the room again, and an exclamation of surprise escaped him as they encountered a photo standing on the piano.**

**"Surely that's a photograph of Mr. Booth," he said. "It exactly resembles the description I have of him?"**

**"Yes," said Mrs. Purnell, "and a very good one it is too."**

**"How long has it been taken?" said Holmes, picking it up.**

**"Oh, only a few weeks, sir. I was here when the boy from the photographer's brought them up. Mr. Booth opened the packet whilst I was in the room. There were only two photos, that one and another which he gave to me."**

**"You interest me exceedingly," said Holmes. "This striped lounge suit he is wearing. Is it the same that he had on when he left Wednesday morning?"**

**"Yes, he was dressed just like that, as far as I can remember."**

**"Do you recollect anything of importance that Mr. Booth said to you last Wednesday before he went out?"**

**"Not very much, I'm afraid, sir. When I took his cup of chocolate up to his bedroom, he said——"**

**"One moment," interrupted Holmes. "Did Mr. Booth usually have a cup of chocolate in the morning?"**

**"Oh, yes, sir, summer and winter alike. He was very particular about it and would ring for it as soon as ever he waked. I believe he'd rather have gone without his breakfast almost than have missed his cup of chocolate. Well, as I was saying, sir, I took it up to him myself on Wednesday morning, and he made some remark about the weather and then, just as I was leaving the room, he said, 'Oh, by the way, Mrs.**

Purnell, I shall be going away tonight for a couple of weeks. I've packed my bag and will call for it this afternoon."

"No doubt you were very much surprised at this sudden announcement?" queried Holmes.

"Not very much, sir. Ever since he's had this auditing work to do for the branch banks, there's been no knowing when he would be away.

Of course, he'd never been off for two weeks at a stretch, except at holiday times, but he had so often been away for a few days at a time that I had got used to his popping off with hardly a moment's notice."

"Let me see, how long has he had this extra work at the bank—several months, hasn't he?"

"More. It was about last Christmas, I believe, when they gave it to him."

"Oh, yes, of course," said Holmes carelessly, "and this work naturally took him from home a good deal?"

"Yes, indeed, and it seemed to quite tire him, so much evening and night work too, you see, sir. It was enough to knock him out, for he was always such a very quiet, retiring gentleman and hardly ever used to go out in the evenings before."

"Has Mr. Booth left many of his possessions behind him?" asked Holmes.

"Very few, indeed, and what he has are mostly old useless things. But he's a most honest thief, sir," said Mrs. Purnell paradoxically, "and paid me his rent, before he went out on Wednesday morning, right up to next Saturday, because he wouldn't be back by then."

"That was good of him," said Holmes, smiling thoughtfully. "By the way, do you happen to know if he gave away any other treasures before he left?"

"Well, not just before, but during the last few months he's taken away most of his books and sold them, I think, a few at a time. He had rather a fancy for old books and has told me that some editions he had were worth quite a lot."

During this conversation, Lestrade had been sitting drumming his fingers impatiently on the table. Now he got up. "Really, I fear I shall

have to leave you to this gossip," he said. "I must go and wire instructions for the arrest of Mr. Booth. If only you would have looked before at this old blotter, which I found in the wastebasket, you would have saved yourself a good deal of unnecessary trouble, Mr. Holmes," and he triumphantly slapped down a sheet of wellused blotting paper on the table.

Holmes picked it up and held it in front of a mirror over the sideboard. Looking over his shoulder I could plainly read the reflected impression of a note written in Mr. Booth's handwriting, of which Holmes had procured samples.

It was to a booking agency in Liverpool, giving instructions to them to book a first-class private cabin and passage on board the Empress Queen from Liverpool to New York. Parts of the note were slightly obliterated by other impressions, but it went on to say that a cheque was enclosed to pay for tickets, etc., and it was signed by J. Booth.

Holmes stood silently scrutinizing the paper for several minutes.

It was a well-used sheet, but fortunately the impression of the note was well in the centre, and hardly obliterated at all by the other marks and blots, which were all round the outer circumference of the paper. In one corner the address of the Liverpool booking agency was plainly decipherable, the paper evidently having been used to blot the envelope with also.

"My dear Lestrade, you have indeed been more fortunate than I had imagined," said Holmes at length, handing the paper back to him.

"May I ask what steps you propose to take next?"

"I shall cable at once to the New York police to arrest the fellow as soon as he arrives," said Lestrade, "but first I must make quite certain the boat doesn't touch at Queenstown or anywhere and give him a chance of slipping through our fingers."

"It doesn't," said Holmes quietly. "I had already looked to see as I thought it not unlikely, at first, that Mr. Booth might have intended to sail by the Empress Queen."

Lestrade gave me a wink for which I would dearly have liked to have knocked him down, for I could see that he disbelieved my friend. I felt a keen pang of disappointment that Holmes's foresight should have been eclipsed in this way by what, after all, was mere good luck on

### **Lestrade's part.**

**Holmes had turned to Mrs. Purnell and was thanking her.**

**"Don't mention it, sir," she said. "Mr. Booth deserves to be caught, though I must say he's always been a gentleman to me. I only wish I could have given you some more useful information."**

**"On the contrary," said Holmes, "I can assure you that what you have told us has been of the utmost importance and will very materially help us. It's just occurred to me, by the way, to wonder if you could possibly put up my friend Dr. Watson and myself for a few days, until we have had time to look into this little matter?"**

**"Certainly, sir, I shall be most happy."**

**"Good," said Holmes. "Then you may expect us back to dinner about seven."**

**When we got outside, Lestrade at once announced his intention of going to the police office and arranging for the necessary orders for Booth's detention and arrest to be cabled to the head of the New York police; Holmes retained an enigmatical silence as to what he proposed to do but expressed his determination to remain at Broomhill and make a few further inquiries. He insisted, however, upon going alone.**

**"Remember, Watson, you are here for a rest and holiday and I can assure you that if you did remain with me you would only find my program a dull one. Therefore, I insist upon your finding some more entertaining way of spending the remainder of the day."**

**Past experience told me that it was quite useless to remonstrate or argue with Holmes when once his mind was made up, so I consented with the best grace I could, and leaving Holmes, drove off in the hansom, which he assured me he would not require further.**

**I passed a few hours in the art gallery and museum and then, after lunch, had a brisk walk out on the Manchester Road and enjoyed the fresh air and moorland scenery, returning to Ashgate Road at seven with better appetite than I had been blessed with for months.**

**Holmes had not returned, and it was nearly half past seven before he came in. I could see at once that he was in one of his most reticent moods, and all my inquiries failed to elicit any particulars of how he**

had passed his time or what he thought about the case.

The whole evening he remained coiled up in an easy chair, puffing at his pipe, and hardly a word could I get from him.

His inscrutable countenance and persistent silence gave me no clue whatever as to his thought on the enquiry he had in hand, although I could see his whole mind was concentrated upon it.

Next morning, just as we had finished breakfast, the maid entered with a note. "From Mr. Jervis, sir; there's no answer," she said.

Holmes tore open the envelope and scanned the note hurriedly and, as he did so, I noticed a flush of annoyance spread over his usually pale face.

"Confound his impudence," he muttered. "Read that, Watson. I don't ever remember to have been treated so badly in a case before."

The note was a brief one:

The Cedars, Fulwood.

September sixth

Mr. Jervis, on behalf of the directors of the British Consolidated Bank, begs to thank Mr. Sherlock Holmes for his prompt attention and valued services in the matter concerning the fraud and disappearance of their ex-employee, Mr. Jabez Booth.

Mr. Lestrade, of Scotland Yard, informs us that he has succeeded in tracking the individual in question who will be arrested shortly. Under these circumstances they feel it unnecessary to take up any more of Mr. Holmes's valuable time.

"Rather cool, eh, Watson? I'm much mistaken if they don't have cause to regret their action when it's too late. After this I shall certainly refuse to act for them any further in the case, even if they ask me to do so. In a way I'm sorry because the matter presented some distinctly interesting features and is by no means the simple affair our friend Lestrade thinks."

"Why, don't you think he is on the right scent?" I exclaimed.



"Wait and see, Watson," said Holmes mysteriously. "Mr. Booth hasn't been caught yet, remember." And that was all that I could get out of him.

One result of the summary way in which the banker had dispensed with my friend's services was that Holmes and I spent a most restful and enjoyable week in the small village of Hathersage, on the edge of the Derbyshire moors, and returned to London feeling better for our long moorland rambles.

Holmes having very little work in hand at the time, and my wife not yet having returned from her Swiss holiday, I prevailed upon him, though not without considerable difficulty, to pass the next few weeks with me instead of returning to his rooms at Baker Street.

Of course, we watched the development of the Sheffield forgery case with the keenest interest. Somehow the particulars of Lestrade's discoveries got into the papers, and the day after we left Sheffield they were full of the exciting chase of Mr. Booth, the man wanted for the Sheffield bank frauds.

They spoke of "the guilty man restlessly pacing the deck of the Empress Queen, as she ploughed her way majestically across the solitary wastes of the Atlantic, all unconscious that the inexorable hand of justice could stretch over the ocean and was already waiting to seize him on his arrival in the New World." And Holmes after reading these sensational paragraphs would always lay down the paper with one of his enigmatical smiles.

At last the day on which the Empress Queen was due at New York arrived, and I could not help but notice that even Holmes's usually inscrutable face wore a look of suppressed excitement as he unfolded the evening paper. But our surprise was doomed to be prolonged still further. There was a brief paragraph to say that the Empress Queen had arrived off Long Island at Six a.m. after a good passage. There was, however, a case of cholera on board, and the New York authorities had consequently been compelled to put the boat in quarantine, and none of the passengers or crew would be allowed to leave her for a period of twelve days.

Two days later there was a full column in the papers stating that it had been definitely ascertained that Mr. Booth was really on board the Empress Queen. He had been identified and spoken to by one of the sanitary inspectors who had had to visit the boat. He was being kept under close observation, and there was no possible chance of his

escaping. Mr. Lestrade of Scotland Yard, by whom Booth had been so cleverly tracked down and his escape forestalled, had taken passage on the Oceania, due in New York on the tenth, and would personally arrest Mr. Booth when he was allowed to land.

Never before or since have I seen my friend Holmes so astonished as when he had finished reading this announcement. I could see that he was thoroughly mystified, though why he should be so was quite a puzzle to me. All day he sat coiled up in an easy chair, with his brows drawn down into two hard lines and his eyes half closed as he puffed away at his oldest brier in silence.

"Watson," he said once, glancing across at me, "it's perhaps a good thing that I was asked to drop that Sheffield case. As things are turning out I fancy I should only have made a fool of myself."

"Why?" I asked.

"Because I began by assuming that somebody else wasn't one—and now it looks as though I had been mistaken."

For the next few days Holmes seemed quite depressed, for nothing annoyed him more than to feel that he had made any mistake in his deductions or got onto a false line of reasoning.

At last the fatal tenth of September, the day on which Booth was to be arrested, arrived. Eagerly but in vain we scanned the evening papers.

The morning of the eleventh came and still brought no news of the arrest, but in the evening papers of that day there was a short paragraph hinting that the criminal had escaped again.

For several days the papers were full of the most conflicting rumours and conjectures as to what had actually taken place, but all were agreed in affirming that Mr. Lestrade was on his way home alone and would be back in Liverpool on the seventeenth or eighteenth.

On the evening of the last named day Holmes and I sat smoking in his Baker Street rooms, when his boy came in to announce that Mr. Lestrade of Scotland Yard was below and would like the favour of a few minutes' conversation.

"Show him up, show him up," said Holmes, rubbing his hands together with an excitement quite unusual to him.

Lestrade entered the room and sat down in the seat to which Holmes waved him, with a most dejected air.

"It's not often I'm at fault, Mr. Holmes," he began, "but in this Sheffield business I've been beaten hollow."

"Dear me," said Holmes pleasantly, "you surely don't mean to tell me that you haven't got your man yet."

"I do," said Lestrade. "What's more, I don't think he ever will be caught!"

"Don't despair so soon," said Holmes encouragingly. "After you have told us all that's already happened, it's just within the bounds of possibility that I may be able to help you with some little suggestions."

Thus encouraged, Lestrade began his strange story to which we both listened with breathless interest.

"It's quite unnecessary for me to dwell upon incidents which are already familiar," he said. "You know of the discovery I made in Sheffield which, of course, convinced me that the man I wanted had sailed for New York on the Empress Queen. I was in a fever of impatience for his arrest, and when I heard that the boat he had taken passage on had been placed in quarantine, I set off at once in order that I might actually lay hands upon him myself. Never have five days seemed so long.

"We reached New York on the evening of the ninth, and I rushed off at once to the head of the New York police and from him learned that there was no doubt whatever that Mr. Jabez Booth was indeed on board the Empress Queen. One of the sanitary inspectors who had had to visit the boat had not only seen but actually spoken to him. The man exactly answered the description of Booth which had appeared in the papers. One of the New York detectives had been sent on board to make a few inquiries and to inform the captain privately of the impending arrest. He found that Mr. Jabez Booth had actually had the audacity to book his passage and travel under his real name without even attempting to disguise himself in any way. He had a private first-class cabin, and the purser declared that he had been suspicious of the man from the first. He had kept himself shut up in his cabin nearly all the time, posing as an eccentric semi-invalid person who must not be disturbed on any account. Most of his meals had been sent down to his cabin, and he had been seen on deck but seldom and hardly ever dined with the rest of the passengers. It was quite evident that he had been

trying to keep out of sight, and to attract as little attention as possible. The stewards and some of the passengers who were approached on the subject later were all agreed that this was the case.

"It was decided that during the time the boat was in quarantine nothing should be said to Booth to arouse his suspicions but that the pursers, steward, and captain, who were the only persons in the secret, should between them keep him under observation until the tenth, the day on which passengers would be allowed to leave the boat. On that day he should be arrested."

Here we were interrupted by Holmes's boy, who came in with a telegram. Holmes glanced at it with a faint smile.

"No answer," he said, slipping it in his waistcoat pocket. "Pray continue your very interesting story, Lestrade."

"Well, on the afternoon of the tenth, accompanied by the New York chief inspector of police and detective Forsyth," resumed Lestrade, "I went on board the Empress Queen half an hour before she was due to come up to the landing stage to allow passengers to disembark.

"The purser informed us that Mr. Booth had been on deck and that he had been in conversation with him about fifteen minutes before our arrival. He had then gone down to his cabin and the purser, making some excuse to go down also, had actually seen him enter it. He had been standing near the top of the companionway since then and was sure Booth had not come up on deck again since.

"At last," I muttered to myself, as we all went down below, led by the purser, who took us straight to Booth's cabin. We knocked but, getting no answer, tried the door and found it locked. The purser assured us, however, that this was nothing unusual. Mr. Booth had had his cabin door locked a good deal and, often, even his meals had been left on a tray outside. We held a hurried consultation and, as time was short, decided to force the door. Two good blows with a heavy hammer broke it from the hinges, and we all rushed in. You can picture our astonishment when we found the cabin empty. We searched it thoroughly, and Booth was certainly not there."

"One moment," interrupted Holmes. "The key of the door-was it on the inside of the lock or not?"

"It was nowhere to be seen," said Lestrade. "I was getting frantic for, by this time, I could feel the vibration of the engines and hear the first

churning sound of the screw as the great boat began to slide slowly down towards the landing stage.

"We were at our wits' end; Mr. Booth must be hiding somewhere on board, but there was now no time to make a proper search for him, and in a very few minutes passengers would be leaving the boat. At last the captain promised us that, under the circumstances, only one landing gangway should be run out and, in company with the purser and stewards, I should stand by it with a complete list of passengers, ticking off each one as he or she left. By this means it would be quite impossible for Booth to escape us even if he attempted some disguise, for no person whatever would be allowed to cross the gangway until identified by the purser or one of the stewards.

"I was delighted with the arrangement, for there was now no way by which Booth could give me the slip.

"One by one the passengers crossed the gangway and joined the jostling crowd on the landing stage and each one was identified and his or her name crossed off my list. There were one hundred and ninety-three first-class passengers on board the Empress Queen, including Booth, and, when one hundred and ninety-two had disembarked, his was the only name which remained!

"You can scarcely realize what a fever of impatience we were in," said Lestrade, mopping his brow at the very recollection, "nor how interminable the time seemed as we slowly but carefully ticked off one by one the whole of the three hundred and twenty-four second-class passengers and the three hundred and ten steerage from my list. Every passenger except Mr. Booth crossed that gangway, but he certainly did not do so. There was no possible room for doubt on that point.

"He must therefore be still on the boat, we agreed, but I was getting panic-stricken and wondered if there were any possibility of his getting smuggled off in some of the luggage which the great cranes were now beginning to swing up onto the pier.

"I hinted my fear to detective Forsyth, and he at once arranged that every trunk or box in which there was any chance for a man to hide should be opened and examined by the customs officers.

"It was a tedious business, but they didn't shirk it, and at the end of two hours were able to assure us that by no possibility could Booth have been smuggled off the boat in this way.

"This left only one possible solution to the mystery. He must be still in hiding somewhere on board. We had had the boat kept under the closest observation ever since she came up to the landing stage, and now the superintendent of police lent us a staff of twenty men and, with the consent of the captain and the assistance of the pursers and stewards, etc., the Empress Queen was searched and re-searched from stem to stern. We didn't leave unexamined a place in which a cat could have hidden, but the missing man wasn't there. Of that I'm certain—and there you have the whole mystery in a nutshell, Mr. Holmes. Mr. Booth certainly was on board the Empress Queen up to, and at, eleven o'clock on the morning of the tenth, and although he could not by any possibility have left it, we are nevertheless face to face with the fact that he wasn't there at five o'clock in the afternoon."

Lestrade's Face, as he concluded his curious and mysterious narrative, bore a look of the most hopeless bewilderment I ever saw, and I fancy my own must have pretty well matched it, but Holmes threw himself back in his easy chair, with his long thin legs stuck straight out in front of him, his whole frame literally shaking with silent laughter. "What conclusion have you come to?" he gasped at length. "What steps do you propose to take next?"

"I've no idea. Who could know what to do? The whole thing is impossible, perfectly impossible; it's an insoluble mystery. I came to you to see if you could, by any chance, suggest some entirely fresh line of inquiry upon which I might begin to work."

"Well," said Holmes, cocking his eye mischievously at the bewildered Lestrade, "I can give you Booth's present address, if it will be of any use to you?"

"His what!" cried Lestrade.

"His present address," repeated Holmes quietly. "But before I do so, my dear Lestrade, I must make one stipulation. Mr. Jervis has treated me very shabbily in the matter, and I don't desire that my name shall be associated with it any further. Whatever you do you must not hint the source from which any information I may give you has come. You promise?"

"Yes," murmured Lestrade, who was in a state of bewildered excitement.

Holmes tore a leaf from his pocket book and scribbled on it: Mr. A. Winter, c/o Mrs. Thackary, Glossop Road, Broomhill, Sheffield.

"You will find there the present name and address of the man you are in search of," he said, handing the paper across to Lestrade. "I should strongly advise you to lose no time in getting hold of him, for though the wire I received a short time ago—which unfortunately interrupted your most interesting narrative—was to tell me that Mr. Winter had arrived back home again after a temporary absence, still it's more than probable that he will leave there, for good, at an early date. I can't say how soon—not for a few days, I should think."

Lestrade rose. "Mr. Holmes, you're a brick," he said, with more real feeling than I have ever seen him show before. "You've saved my reputation in this job just when I was beginning to look like a perfect fool, and now you're forcing me to take all the credit, when I don't deserve one atom. As to how you have found this out, it's as great a mystery to me as Booth's disappearance was."

"Well, as to that," said Holmes airily, "I can't be sure of all the facts myself, for of course I've never looked properly into the case. But they are pretty easy to conjecture, and I shall be most happy to give you my idea of Booth's trip to New York on some future occasion when you have more time to spare."

"By the way," called out Holmes, as Lestrade was leaving the room, "I shouldn't be surprised if you find Mr. Jabez Booth, alias Mr. Archibald Winter, a slight acquaintance of yours, for he would undoubtedly be a fellow passenger of yours, on your homeward journey from America. He reached Sheffield a few hours before you arrived in London and, as he has certainly just returned from New York, like yourself, it's evident you must have crossed on the same boat. He would be wearing smoked glasses and have a heavy dark moustache."

"Ah! " said Lestrade, "there was a man called Winter on board who answered to that description. I believe it must have been he, and I'll lose no more time," and Lestrade hurried off.

"Well, Watson, my boy, you look nearly as bewildered as our friend Lestrade," said Holmes, leaning back in his chair and looking roguishly across at me, as he lighted his old brier pipe.



**"I must confess that none of the problems you have had to solve, in the past, seemed more inexplicable to me than Lestrade's account of Booth's disappearance from the Empress Queen. "**

**"Yes, that part of the story is decidedly neat," chuckled Holmes, "but I'll tell you how I got at the solution of the mystery. I see you are ready to listen.**

**"The first thing to do in any case is to gauge the intelligence and cunning of the criminal. Now, Mr. Booth was undoubtedly a clever man. Mr. Jervis himself, you remember, assured us as much. The fact that he opened banking accounts in preparation for the crime twelve months before he committed it proves it to have been a long-premeditated one. I began the case, therefore, with the knowledge that I had a clever man to catch, who had had twelve months in which to plan his escape.**

**"My first real clues came from Mrs. Purnell," said Holmes. "Most important were her remarks about Booth's auditing work which kept him from home so many days and nights, often consecutively. I felt certain at once, and inquiry confirmed, that Mr. Booth had had no such extra work at all. Why then had he invented lies to explain these absences to his landlady? Probably because they were in some way connected, either with the crime, or with his plans for escaping after he had committed it. It was inconceivable that so much mysterious outdoor occupation could be directly connected with the forgery, and I at once deduced that this time had been spent by Booth in paving the way for his escape.**

**"Almost at once the idea that he had been living a double life occurred to me, his intention doubtless being to quietly drop one individuality after committing the crime and permanently take up the other—a far safer and less clumsy expedient than the usual one of assuming a new disguise just at the moment when everybody is expecting and looking for you to do so.**

**"Then there were the interesting facts relating to Booth's picture and books. I tried to put myself in his place. He valued these possessions highly; they were light and portable, and there was really no reason whatever why he should part with them. Doubtless, then, he had taken them away by degrees and put them someplace where he could lay hands on them again. If I could find out where this place was, I felt sure there would be every chance I could catch him when he attempted to recover them.**

"The picture couldn't have gone far for he had taken it out with him on the very day of the crime ... I needn't bore you with details ... I was two hours making inquiries before I found the house at which he had called and left it—which was none other than Mrs. Thackary's in Glossop Road.

"I made a pretext for calling there and found Mrs. T. one of the most easy mortals in the world to pump. In less than half an hour I knew that she had a boarder named Winter, that he professed to be a commercial traveler and was from home most of the time. His description resembled Booth's save that he had a mustache, wore glasses.

"As I've often tried to impress upon you before, Watson, details are the most important things of all, and it gave me a real thrill of pleasure to learn that Mr. Winter had a cup of chocolate brought up to his bedroom every morning. A gentleman called on the Wednesday morning and left a parcel, saying it was a picture he had promised for Mr. Winter, and asking Mrs. Thackary to give it to Winter when he returned. Mr. Winter had taken the rooms the previous December. He had a good many books which he had brought in from time to time. All these facts taken in conjunction made me certain that I was on the right scent. Winter and Booth were one and the same person, and as soon as Booth had put all his pursuers off the track he would return, as Winter, and repossess his treasures.

"The newly taken photo and the old blotter with its telltale note were too obviously intentional means of drawing the police onto Booth's track. The blotter, I could see almost at once, was a fraud, for not only would it be almost impossible to use one in the ordinary way so much without the central part becoming undecipherable, but I could see where it had been touched up.

"I concluded therefore that Booth, alias Winter, never actually intended to sail on the Empress Queen, but in that I underestimated his ingenuity. Evidently he booked two berths on the boat, one in his real, and one in his assumed name, and managed very cleverly to successfully keep up the two characters throughout the voyage, appearing first as one individual and then as the other. Most of the time he posed as Winter, and for this purpose Booth became the eccentric semi-invalid passenger who remained locked up in his cabin for such a large part of his time. This, of course, would answer his purpose well; his eccentricity would only draw attention to his presence on board and so make him one of the best-known passengers

on the boat, although he showed so little of himself.

"I had left instructions with Mrs. Thackary to send me a wire as soon as Winter returned. When Booth had led his pursuers to New York, and there thrown them off the scent, he had nothing more to do but to take the first boat back. Very naturally it chanced to be the same as that on which our friend Lestrade returned, and that was how Mrs. Thackary's wire arrived at the opportune moment it did."